



Healthy Choices Program Info



What is this program and what does it do?

The Healthy Choices program, created and operated by Community Support Services, Inc, a non-profit organization providing community-based support and services to children and adults with autism, focuses on teaching nutrition and healthy meal preparation to adults who are disabled by autism. A true “garden to table” program, the Healthy Choices program utilizes produce grown in community and home gardens by CSS supported individuals in the recipes taught, as well as produce from partner organization Red Wiggler Farms, a non-profit CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) farm in Germantown, MD. The program currently serves over 40 adults, and CSS hopes to expand the program to include over 80 adults each year.

Why is this important?

There is a great need for nutrition instruction that targets adults with autism. The Healthy Choices program utilizes the services of nutrition consultants and special education consultants to teach individuals to make healthy choices in meal planning, safely utilize kitchen tools and utensils in meal preparation, and effectively prepare low-fat, high protein snacks and meals for themselves according to their particular preferences. There are currently no programs in Montgomery County offering specialized instruction in nutrition and cooking skills to individuals with autism or developmental disabilities.

Who benefits?

Adults with autism and developmental disabilities are prone to poor nutritional habits and health problems due to a variety of factors. Obesity rates for this population are often 50-100% higher than the rates for their non-disabled peers. Most adults do not participate in regular exercise due to very limited community opportunities to participate in recreation, exercise and sports programs which further compounds this life-threatening issue. Additionally, meal preparation is a basic life skill that would greatly enhance an individual's independence. This program empowers adults with autism with the skills needed to combat obesity and its related health problems, and improve their independence and participation in their home communities. Outcomes from this project include an increase in the variety of healthy foods enjoyed by program participants, an increase in skills to prepare meals, an increase in cooking skills of staff participating in a concurrent staff training, and improvement in safe kitchen practices by staff and participants.

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